Joint Chiefs Favor Neutralization of Haiphong Harbor in N. Vietnam

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) has put on the record what almost everyone knew: the Joint Chiefs of Staff favor neutralizing Haiphong harbor.

In a Senate speech Tuesday, Symington referred to classified testimony by the service chiefs before Senate committees from January into March. He said he had asked the Pentagon to declassify these portions of the Joint Chiefs' testimony, but a Defense Department spokesman said yesterday that he knew of no plans to do so.

Symington took the Senate floor to refute reports that the service chiefs were pressing for all-out bombing of North Vietnamese cities. Instead, he said, the service chiefs had testified "that they were unanimous in believing a neutralization of the harbor facilities at Haiphong would help our military operations in South Vietnam."

Symington said this could be done by air attacks on the docks, "or by the same efforts against this North Vietnamese harbor that the Vietcong" have made against the Saigon harbor.

He noted that the chiefs had nonetheless supported the "decision of higher authority." Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has said he believes it would be unwise at this point to broaden the choice of targets.

The position of the Joint Chiefs became known unofficially in mid-March when several sources reported simultaneously from the Pentagon that the Generals and Admirals wanted to hit a wider range of targets. Specifically, they wanted to strike the fuel and oil stocks in the Haiphong area that contributed to the massive infiltration of forces into South Vietnam.

When Sen. Joseph S. Clark (D-Pa.) expressed surprise to learn that this was the position of the Joint Chiefs, Symington said he had tried repeatedly to have this information declassified by the Department of Defense.